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INFO RUEHXQ/ALL EUROPEAN UNION POST COLLECTIVE
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RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 3821
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0489
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2538
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0186
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1112

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 MEXICO 001227

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/MEX, WHA/PDA, STATE FOR OES/IHB, PA, CAPRESS;
STATE FOR MED/DASHO (MCFADDEN, RINALDO, KEYES); STATE FOR
MED/DIR (PENNER); STATE FOR DS/IP/WHA; CDC FOR
CCID/NCPDCID, CCID/NCIRD AND COGH/DPPPC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC CVIS CASC KSCA TBIO MX

SUBJECT: SITREP 7 - H1N1 FLU OUTBREAK IN MEXICO CITY

11. (U) SUMMARY:

April 30 GOM estimates of confirmed H1N1 cases and deaths rose to 260 cases, including 12 deaths. On April 30, the Embassy issued an updated warden statement and announced that Mission operations will be closed on May 4, 2009. This closure complies with the GOM's decision to close its non-emergency operations in government offices.

12. (U) FEDERAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTIONS:

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

-- At a press conference on April 30, Secretary of Health Cordova announced that the GOM will now have six labs running tests in Mexico City, Veracruz, and Acapulco.

-- There are currently no plans to postpone elections, however, the GOM postponed electoral training activities and recommended political parties to prevent large crowds during political campaigns.

-- In response to the GOM's April 29 request for assistance, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced the donation of 4M doses (400K courses) of Tamiflu to arrive in Mexico May 1, 2009. Moreover, on April 29 the US Embassy announced assistance of USD 5 million to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to support Mexico's efforts to contain the spread of the H1N1 Influenza in Mexico. The funds will provide equipment and supplies that will facilitate the diagnosis and treatment of people suffering from the disease. In addition, USAID/OFDA is currently preparing 100,000 personal protective equipment kits (PPE kits) to deliver to healthcare workers in Mexico.

MEXICO CITY GOVERNMENT:

On April 30, Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard said that there had been a reduction of the number of influenza cases

reported, but encouraged everyone to continue following precautionary measures. He also said that his administration and that of other state governments need to channel resources towards equipment and improvements in health and medical facilities.

13. (U) ACTIONS BY NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Nothing new to report.

14. (SBU) STATISTICS:

-- At a press conference on April 30, the Secretary of Health Cordova said the number of new H1N1 flu cases was stabilizing. Cordova says he hopes that trend will continue and that a vaccine will be available in six months.

-- Cordova confirmed a total of 260 H1N1 flu cases, including 12 deaths. He said he will no longer give figures on possible/suspect cases to avoid confusion. He explained that the increase in the number of deaths did not mean more people died in the past 24 hours, but that authorities have been able to confirm more cases through the lab tests. Note: We continue to have problems obtaining consistent government statistical data. End Note.

--Hospital capacity/occupancy remains at an estimated 70%.

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15. (U) MANAGEMENT ISSUES:

-- Operation of the Embassy's call center (with 3 phones and 3 computers) began on April 30. Callers can either dial direct or access the center through the main embassy greeting (press 1 for influenza info, then press 0 to speak to a call center staffer).

-- Mission operations will be closed on May 4, 2009. This closure complies with the GOM's decision to close its non-emergency operations in government offices. Tuesday, May 5, 2009 is also a national holiday. Mission Mexico operations will resume on Wednesday, May 6, 2009.

-- Post continues to encourage the use of liberal leave for any personal concerns related to the flu.

-- Embassy is denying all TDY travel except those responding to the H1N1 flu outbreak and TDYs that are deemed absolutely mission essential. This includes the retraction of country clearances already granted.

16. (U) SECURITY ISSUES:

-- A warden check was conducted on April 29 with an 80 percent response rate (within 2 hours of initial contact). A radio check is planned for the weekend.

-- Embassy convened an EAC and virtual town hall with 300 participants on April 30. The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 6, 0900 local time.

17. (U) CONSULAR ISSUES:

-- U.S. EMBASSY: The Embassy issued an updated warden

message April 30, the sixth in seven days. The message refers to the latest information regarding H1N1 Influenza A and alerts Amcits to the enhanced health screening for all international passengers departing Mexico from Mexico City (Benito Juarez), Guadalajara, Monterrey, Cancun, Cabo San Lucas, and Puerto Vallarta airports. Passengers with high temperatures or testing positive for the H1N1 virus will be denied boarding.

-- NIV appointments have been suspended through the end of next week (May 8).

-- The Embassy call center received over 400 H1N1-flu related calls on April 30, less than the previous day.

-- PEACE CORPS: Peace Corps (PC) Mexico currently has 57 volunteers in Mexico, all of which were put on a Q&standfastQ8 status April 29. (Note: Standfast in the PC Emergency Action Plan means that volunteers must stay near their sites, with no incidental travel away from their home of work sites.) PC volunteers have been kept fully informed of all Embassy, WHO, and GOM communiquQs. All volunteers have been contacted by both cell phones and email and are required to check in daily with PC headquarters in Queretaro for any further instructions. Volunteers are advised not to take public transportation or stay in crowded venues.

-- CONSULATE, CIUDAD JUAREZ: Consular employees contacted applicants impacted by the suspension in services to notify them that immigrant visa (IV) interviews are suspended until May 8. All other consular operations at the U.S. Consulate

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General in Ciudad Juarez report no other significant change in operations since the April 29 SitRep. IV operations will now be suspended through May 15. The National Visa Center is notifying applicants scheduled the May 11 through May 15.

-- CONSULATE, GUADALAJARA: ACS handled approximately 25 cases today. The Visa Section handled three emergency cases.

-- CONSULATE, NOGALES: The consulate has not received any calls regarding the flu outbreak in the past three days. Visa services are suspended until May 8th. ACS services continue with limited service for emergencies and will accept passport/CRBA applications. Employee absenteeism continues within normal limits. A meeting of the local Integrated Emergency Management Group has been scheduled for Thursday May 7.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, MERIDA: There has not been a noticeable increase in the demand for American Citizen Services. None of the Consulate staff to date has exercised the liberal sick leave policy. Staff and EFMs remain calm. The Consulate held another town hall meeting today to pass information on the H1N1 virus and provide guidance should a staff member fall ill over the weekend. The Consulate will also perform a test on the mission phone tree tonight to prepare for any contingencies over the long weekend.

-- U.S. CONSULATE, MONTERREY: Post held a town hall meeting on April 29 to emphasize that H1N1 flu responds to treatment if prompt medical attention is sought. American Citizen Services (ACS) has issued warden messages forwarded by Embassy, so now five warden messages have been sent to the local American community. NIV received only a handful of phone calls and four e-mail inquiries about visas. One emergency O1 visa renewal for a physician working in Texas was issued. The Monterrey Applicant Services Center (ASC) is closed to the public but minimal staff are working.

-- U.S. CONSULATE TIJUANA: The suspension of non-essential consular services has been very smooth. The call center was successful in re-programming all non-emergency NIV appointments without problems Q* no applicants came to the

Consulate after Tuesday, and there were only 4 that day. NIV has received only a few requests for emergency appointments and has processed only 5 visas. Some passport and CRBA applicants have rescheduled, but most kept their appointments. The number of public inquiries to the Consulate concerning suspension of services or general concern over the H1N1 flu situation have been surprisingly low, including very few from the families of our prisoners.

18. (U) BORDER AND CONSULATE ISSUES:

-- CIUDAD JUAREZ: Following the GOM's lead, Chihuahua State and Juarez Municipal governments will suspend all non-essential activities from May 1 to May 6. In Ciudad Juarez, the Mayor's office told Post that the Municipal Police, Health Department, and the Department of Civil Protection will remain open. These closures add to earlier announcements by State authorities that all public events, bars, nights, movies, gyms, and other large gatherings will be suspended until May 6.

Poloff observed normal activity during visits on April 29 to hospitals and bus stations in Ciudad Juarez. The medical personnel at the largest bus station in the city reported no cases of sick passengers. Despite the municipal government's claim on April 29 that 200,000 brochures were printed and being distributed, personnel at the hospitals and bus stations that poloff visited did not have brochures.

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CBP reports that passenger and vehicle traffic has not changed significantly since the H1N1 outbreak began. (Passenger and vehicle traffic at international bridges in El Paso/Ciudad Juarez increased by less than 1 percent from April 19-21 to April 26-28.) The Juarez delegate to the National Chamber of Commerce (CANACO) estimates that the city's economy will lose approximately USD \$ 115 million as a result of the business and event closures related to the H1N1 flu. According to the Maquiladora Association of Juarez (AMAC), manufacturing plants will offer temporary leave to employees with school-aged children due to the federal government's decision to close schools. AMAC reports that the many of the city's manufacturing plants were already operating only three days a week due to the economic slowdown.

-- GUADALAJARA: Following suit from the national closures from May 1-6, state and local officials have declared their closures until May 6. RSO reports no significant incidents in the area and no Q&panic buyingQ8 as of yet. Public transit and airline flights continue to operate normally. As a result of the epidemic, the Jalisco Chamber of Bars and Restaurants estimates that their members have lost some \$450 million pesos, and hotels are seeing their numbers drop by about 25%.

-- NOGALES: Public reaction remains the same throughout Nogales, that is to say, people appear calm and public use of masks is light. CBP reports heavier than normal northbound traffic at both Nogales ports of entry. CBP added that northbound traffic has been inconsistent in the last few weeks and they are not able to make the assertion that the heavier than normal traffic today is due to the current health situation.

--MERIDA: Cancun airport is installing 50 thermo-detectors to screen for fever in arriving and departing passengers. Merida airport stated it has personnel with wireless thermometers to measure the temperatures of departing passengers. The airport is still requiring all passengers to fill out a health questionnaire. In the Yucatan, local press is reporting a 70% drop in use of local transportation and 31% of hotel reservations in the state have been canceled. Local archeological sites and cinemas remain closed. The Hospital Regional de Alta Especialidad is preparing one floor

of the hospital in order to isolate any potential cases

-- MONTERREY: Campaign rallies for the candidates for Nuevo Leon Governor have been postponed, and it is possible that the campaigns for federal Congressional seats will be postponed as well. The government in San Luis Potosi has closed nightclubs, restaurants, bars and health clubs, and they are disinfecting public buses. In addition, the San Luis Potosi public and private hospitals have supplies of anti-flu medication. In Coahuila, the government is distributing 500,000 face masks, and Tamiflu is also available.

The PAN Mayor of the Monterrey suburb of Santa Catarina told the CG that the PAN Mayors throughout Mexico would meet on May 5, probably in Queretaro (but possibly in Zacatecas) to discuss their public message on the H1N1 crisis. Zacatecas city mayor Cuahtemoc Calderon, the head of the PAN Mayors group (ANAC), would chair the meeting.

Traffic remains very light in Nuevo Leon, and many post contacts are traveling to Texas for the long holiday weekend.

A number of public and private venues have closed voluntarily. In San Luis Potosi (SLP), the situation appears to be under control, and despite the closing of public venues such as restaurants and bars, people seem calmer than before.

Church services have also been suspended. Most people are staying home and many are wearing face masks. Some people plan to leave for the United States for the long holiday weekend. The SLP consular agency is informing the public that the border remains open but to expect possible delays.

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The Monterrey Consulate and the SLP consular agency are both providing information about the CBP website on border wait times. Meanwhile, in Durango, private businesses report that restaurant business has declined 15-60%.

-- TIJUANA: Government offices will close throughout our district in accordance with the ordered closures announced by the GOM. Prisons and state penitentiaries have suspended all visits with inmates until further notice. No other closures have been ordered. Restaurants and shops remain open, but very empty. Churches announced they will have services but will take measures to limit person to person contact. Many newspapers included special inserts in today's editions on how to protect yourself from the flu.

Border wait times continue to be very low. CBP reports that they are passively screening individuals for possible illness. Unconfirmed media reports indicate that as many as 50 people were referred to secondary inspection yesterday due to concerns over possible illnesses.

Shops and restaurants continue to see a slowdown in business with the exception of the sale facemasks, which are now becoming very scarce. Several cruise ships originally scheduled to make stops in Ensenada and Cabo San Lucas were diverted away from our district and will now remain in the US. Air travel in and out of the Tijuana airport continues as normal with virtually no cancellations. In-coming and out-going air travelers are being screened on a selective basis.

--MATAMOROS: All businesses appear to be closing on Monday.

--NUEVO LAREDO: There continues to be less-than-normal traffic going to the U.S. April 30 from Nuevo Laredo. Restaurants continue to be open. There are only a few people on the streets in face masks and the public is calm. Post has had only one call about the flu since the H1N1 flu began.

¶9. (U) MEDIA REACTION/GENERAL POPULATION SENTIMENTS:

The Mexican media's coverage of the swine flu outbreak on April 30 focused on the GOM's announcement to suspend all non-essential federal services from May 1 to 5. Reports highlighted that Q&production and availability of food, medicine and basic services is guaranteed.Q8 Headlines included, Q&Government, factories suspend labor for five daysQ8 (El Universal); Q&Holiday decreeQ8 (Reforma); Q&Calderon says stay homeQ8 (Milenio); Q&Government suspends public servicesQ8 (Excelsior). Media coverage also reported the raising of the WHO alert level to 5. Commentators pointed out that this Q&does not change the measures that Mexico is already taking and does not mean the virus is more dangerous, only that there are more cases around the world.Q8

Newspaper Reforma featured a poll that shows divided opinion among Mexicans. According to the poll, 49% of Mexicans said they fear contagion, while the other 50% said they were not concerned. Most media also featured reports that US legislators have asked the US Secretary of Homeland Security to consider closing the border with Mexico, and the negative response of President Obama to this petition. The media also reported on the installation of thermo scanners in the Mexico City airport and the suspension of visa appointments in the U.S. Consulates in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez.

Also noteworthy was President CalderonQ,s meeting with former Health secretaries to hear their views on how to go about the outbreak, and the statement by the Secretary of Finance who estimated Mexico's GDP will drop a further 0.5% due to the

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outbreak but assured that the GOM has enough resources under the Catastrophe Expenses Fund and the swap lines with the World Bank and the Inter American Development Bank.

10. (U) ECONOMIC IMPACT

FOOD SUPPLY: Wal-Mart supermarkets, Mexico's largest supermarket chain, see no supply problems for the foreseeable future. Apart from low stocks of cleaning alcohol, face masks and vitamin C, Wal-Mart does not foresee running out of any basic items. If some brands do sell out (i.e. tuna), they have other brands available. Masks have been a problem, and their US parent store has ordered several million. Wal-Mart Mexico's stores (Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, Bodega Aurrera, Superama, Suburbia) are showing a slight surge in sales, consistent with last week's pattern, particularly in higher income neighborhoods.

Modest (i.e. not panicked) stockpiling by consumers is generalized, but more pronounced in higher income areas. There is also a general concern that many people are using credit cards to charge their groceries, bucking a previous trend towards cash. Wal-Mart is also the owner of the largest restaurant chain in Mexico, VIPS. Their restaurants in the DF are open for take-out only, and revenues are at 17% of their usual levels. Restaurants in the rest of the country are running at 50%, with different states requiring different maximum occupancy rates. Wal-Mart is fine with this for the moment and comfortable with the level of operations.

The Central de Abasto, Mexico City's city-run central food distribution market has put out a press release announcing that it will Q&guaranteeQ8 the supply of food to the city. The city says there has been no interruption of any food supply.

11. TRANSPORTATION

In a 30 April press conference, Secretary of Communications and Transportation Molinar Horcasitas emphasized the GOM's commitment to guarantee transportation service. He noted that trucking companies are operating normally, but that passenger loads on public transportation, from minibuses to airplanes, have declined. He stressed that the supply of food is not at risk. The Secretary's comments track with our grasp of the transport situation. The Secretary also noted he had talked by phone on 29 April with his counterparts in the U.S., UK, Spain, Italy, and France -- making special mention of the EU's decision not to suspend air traffic to Mexico.

Both terminals at Mexico City International Airport (AICM) are screening outbound passengers as of 30 April, including thermometer readings for all. The process is not at this point delaying departures. AICM is beginning an information campaign to reinforce the message that the facility is open and functioning normally. Flight cancellations remain few in number. Airports such as Cancun, dedicated more directly to tourist travel, are seeing a more pronounced slowdown. The new measures implemented by the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation could spread to additional airports beyond the initial 6 once the logistics are mastered at the first sites, according to a contact at the Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGAC, Mexico's FAA).

Passenger volume on inbound flights from the U.S. is now very low. Load factors of 15-20% are common. Outbound traffic remains brisk. Reservation centers are not/not recording large numbers of Mexican nationals leaving the country, apart

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from regular vacation travel booked well in advance. Wide-body flights from Europe show very low, while outbound flights are full of European tourists, many of whom have advanced their departure dates.

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